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STRENGTHENING AND FURTHER IMPROVING EXTENSION WORK
THROUGH THE FARM UNIT APPROACH

There are many evidences of the need for a general guide statement which depicts, at least in broad terms, what the Extension Service means when it refers to strengthening and further improving the efficiency of its work through the farm and home unit approach. Some confusion has apparently arisen relative to extension's use of such terms as the unit approach to extension work, farm and home development, balanced farming, farm and home planning, and such other terms as have been used in the various States over the years with respect to an integrated extension approach in rendering counsel to farm families. This statement has been prepared to meet, at least in part, these general needs.

The statement in no sense attempts to provide specific answers to many questions of a detailed operational nature which might be raised. Neither is it intended to imply that this type of extension work is something entirely new, nor does it undertake to differentiate between the specific detailed operational procedures which are being used by extension in the various States. Rather it reflects the growing appreciation that the complexities facing modern-day farm families are such that they have to make a much more careful analysis of their problems and opportunities, and develop a more carefully outlined course of action in relation thereto, if their efforts are to be repaid with adequate economic returns and family satisfactions.

In turn extension has an obligation so to adjust and apply its educational services that it may utilize its resources most efficiently in rendering counsel and guidance to individual farm families in their efforts to cope successfully with all of their complex farm and home problems.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "THE UNIT APPROACH"?

It is simply an effort on the part of the extension service to provide farm families, in a better organized and more intensive way, with necessary counsel and assistance to enable them to: (a) identify and analyze effectively all their major farm and home problems and opportunities, (b) determine a definite course of action in relation thereto which will produce the maximum in terms of continuing economic returns and family satisfactions, (c) put such plans into effect as rapidly as feasible, and (d) adjust them wisely as circumstances warrant.

As the farm family views their farm and home development program it is simply a carefully planned program to insure that the resources available, or which can be made available, are utilized most effectively to achieve efficient production; the highest net income feasible on a continuing basis; the maintenance, conservation, proper use and improvement wherever possible, of soil, water, and other resources; better living for the farm family; and the attainment of family goals and objectives.

Extension always has had the responsibility to assist farm families with such problems and with such forward programming. This it has always endeavored to do. However, very successful work carried on in many States, particularly during the past decade, of realigning extension methods and resources to apply them more effectively to all of the complex individual farm and home problems, has proven that even greater contributions can be made to farm families through the unit approach rather than concentrating entirely on rendering assistance with specific problems on an independent basis.

Hence extension's efforts to put more emphasis on the unit approach in rendering services to farm families.

WHY DO FARM FAMILIES NEED TO MAKE THIS KIND OF AN APPROACH?

On a family farm, the farm business and the home are inseparable. Decisions made on the farm must consider both the effect on the farm operations and the farm family. This is not true for most other types of businesses.

Recent changes in farming and family living, especially in the last 10 years, are requiring farm families to adjust their methods of operation and their patterns of living. This has increased the necessity for farm families to consider many alternative choices both in their farming operations and in their family living. Some of these changes are:

- (1) The much greater amount of capital required now, as compared with times past, to finance a farm business, and the much higher proportion of the gross income which has to be expended for cash operating costs, greatly increases the economic vulnerability of farm families today.
- (2) Farm families in general now have a higher level of living. They have modern housing, more education, better nutrition, increased community facilities, and other improved conditions. A high proportion of the costs involved in maintaining these advantages are cash costs. To maintain, or to improve this level of living, farm families will be required to do a better job of business management and selection among the many alternative choices available to them.
- (3) The increased development and use of home equipment and modern methods, farm machinery, fertilizers, hybrid crops and livestock, insect and weed control, and changes in marketing methods and government programs, all require much more technical "know-how" to make the management decisions required of the farm operators and farm families today.

In order to meet this situation, many farm families need and want help in their development of more thorough operating programs and in making sound management decisions based on the constant flow of excellent research information available from the State Experiment Stations, the Department of Agriculture, and other appropriate sources. The challenge to the Extension Service is to more adequately meet this need.

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WHAT DOES THIS INTEGRATED EXTENSION APPROACH INVOLVE?

It involves an effort to organize extension's educational resources and methods so as to render more efficient service to farm families in coping with their problems as a whole rather than solely on an individual detailed problem basis. It represents a natural evolutionary process, based on 40 years of experience and the necessity for adjusting extension's methods of rendering service to keep them in line with current needs.

Specifically it is directed to assisting individual farm families, in view of both short- and long-time considerations, to more systematically analyze their problems and plan their operations, in light of:

1. Their self-determined farm business and family living goals.
2. The opportunities that exist to (a) improve upon their over-all farm management plans, (b) increase their production and marketing efficiency, (c) bring their production more nearly in line with market demands, (d) make more effective use of credit facilities, (e) better conserve land, water, and other resources, and (f) make other significant changes in the interest of good farming and family living.
3. The necessity for individual farm families to correlate family living plans and goals with prospective family income and resources.

These considerations involve three major decisions farm families are constantly required to make, namely; (1) What to do, (2) when to do it, and (3) how to do it.

IS THIS TYPE OF EXTENSION EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE NEEDED EQUALLY BY ALL FARM FAMILIES?

All family-operated farm businesses have to make this type of an approach to their problems to be successful. Extension assistance of this type should be available to all who desire it insofar as extension resources permit. However, there are certain general groups of farm families more in need and desirous of this type of assistance than others. Indicative of such groups are the following:

1. New farm families who are endeavoring to develop a longtime basic plan for their farms and homes which will most adequately meet the family needs.
2. Farm families who have changed farms and need to appraise the problems and opportunities thus presented.
3. Established farmers who for one reason or another are faced with significant adjustments in their farming operations for any of numerous possible reasons.

4. Farm families having inadequate resources who need to develop more adequate incomes through better utilization of the limited resources they have available or through the development of additional sources of income.

RELATION OF THIS TYPE OF EXTENSION ASSISTANCE TO OTHER EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The Extension Service through its 40 years of experience has developed a pattern of activities and programs which most rural people will expect and desire to be continued. It will be necessary for county extension workers to devote much of their time to these well-established activities. All requests for information and counsel with respect to detailed individual problems will have to be met and will continue to be important. However, county extension plans of work should, as rapidly as possible, provide for rendering more assistance to individual farm families, or groups of families with somewhat comparable problems, on the unit approach basis.

In so doing it will be necessary to:

- (1) Determine, with the help of local county extension advisory committees, which families need and want this type of more intensive and personal assistance, and whose operations could be used most effectively for demonstration purposes;
- (2) Develop an acceptable procedure, within the limits of resources available, to render such services efficiently;
- (3) Provide enough help, information, and counsel to enable the farmers involved to think through their more pressing problems, to reach their own conclusions as to the best solutions, and to chart a course of action for the future;
- (4) Redirect extension activities so as to most effectively make available to these families the technical information and assistance necessary to improve their skills and to utilize their resources most advantageously as they put their programs into operation.

It is obvious that families interested in and desirous of extension assistance of this type will have varying abilities to analyze their problems adequately and to determine the most practical solutions. Extension workers should maintain the objective of helping these families think through all the significant farm and home problems involved, and their interrelations, to the end that they make a reasonably thorough analysis of all significant problems and chart a definite course for the future. However, there is no valid point in undertaking to go further at a given time than the individual families involved are able to and interested in going.

Hence the objective should be to maintain a serious and sustained effort to assist as many farm families as feasible in developing their farm and home programs in a systematic way. In actual operations, and in view of varying interests and needs, these efforts now take the form of:

1. Helping families with sound and complete programs to adjust them as conditions change and adjustments are needed.
2. Helping families with inadequate or ineffective programs to improve them.
3. Helping farmers with partial programs to complete them. For instance, many farmers have conservation plans for their farms developed with the assistance of Soil Conservation technicians. Such conservation plans provide an excellent starting point in the development of overall production and management programs. However, in developing complete programs other related adjustments need to be considered carefully in addition to the purely physical aspects of conservation requirements.
4. Helping families with no recognized programs to develop them.

Where families are participating in the supervised loan programs of the Farmers Home Administration, representatives of that agency are providing this type of assistance hence similar assistance to these families will not be required from the Extension Service. However, there are many other farm families who have not developed definite programs to whom the extension service can render valuable assistance of this type.

Of course the development of a farm and home program is not an end in itself. Such programs have limited value until they are put into effect. Hence extension has continuing responsibility to help farm families put such plans into effect, and adjust them as circumstances warrant; also to provide such additional technical information and counsel on a continuing basis as may be essential to successful operations within the individual farm and home programs the families have developed.



